Met Office help teams win NASA prizes

Clothing that connects to the Internet, a mobile app that finds the cheapest wifi connection or tracking air pollution with your phone. Not technology from a sci-fi movie, but cutting edge ideas from Met Office organised "Space Apps Challenges" named winners by NASA.

The Met Office arranged two of 95 International Space Apps Challenge hakathons held worldwide with the aim of contributing to space exploration missions and improve life on Earth.

NASA judges named three solutions from the hackathon at the Met Office in Exeter and the event organized by the Met Office and V&A Museum held at the Science Museum , London as "best in class" winners of the 2014 International Space Apps Challenge.

The winning ideas are:

- Aurora Wearables - Best Mission Concept winner - created at Space Apps Exeter (Met Office) from collaboration between artists, fashion designers, technologists, and software developers. This is an internet-connected spacesuit designed for astronauts to wear on the International Space Station and beyond.
- Android Base Station - Best Use of Hardware - created at Space Apps London to transform a smart phone into wifi hotspot by connecting to satellites using a 3-D printed receiver.
- SkySnapper - Galactic Impact - created at Space Apps London to measure air quality by snapping photos of the sky. Crowd-sourced sky images are mapped to assess air pollution by sky colour to spot polluted areas and monitor progress over time.

More than 8000 people took part in the two-day challenge developing software, hardware, data visualization, and mobile or Web applications that contribute to space exploration missions and help improve life on Earth. This year nearly 40 challenges represented NASA mission priorities and in five themed areas: Earth Watch, Technology in Space, Human Space flight, Robotics, and Asteroids.

Aurora Wearables project lead Jon Spooner (Unlimited Space Agency) said: "We're delighted to have won. While we're proud leaders of the project, it was a truly collaborative effort and is further evidence of the power of art, play and storytelling to inspire engagement with science. The support we received in particular from the Met Office and the Faculty of Arts & Design at Exeter College was inspirational".

Glen Searle from Android Base Station said: "For there to be innovation, people need the freedom to try and fail. If you want people to be successful you need them to make good judgements, nothing teaches them this better then events like the Space Apps hackathon. Where everyone is free to explore their ideas just to see what happens".

Ben Noble from PA's SkySnapper team said: "The team is very excited to have been announced as winners and we're hoping to take SkySnapper forward as a real solution to the world's air pollution problems".

Meanwhile social media users around the world joined the judging action to vote for their favourite projects.

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